

ROGERS
RANGER
AND
LOYALIST

A PAPER BY
WALTER ROGERS, ESQ., B.A.
Barrister, Inner Temple, London, Eng.

READ BEFORE
THE UNITED EMPIRE LOYALISTS'
ASSOCIATION OF ONTARIO, AT
TORONTO, 14 DECEMBER, 1899.

BY
LIEUT-COLONEL H. C. ROGERS,
OF PETERBOROUGH, ONT.

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Rogers—Ranger and Loyalist.

BY WALTER ROGERS, B.A., BARRISTER, INNER TEMPLE, LONDON, ENG.

Read before the United Empire Loyalists' Association of Ontario, at Toronto, 14th December, 1899, by Lt.-Col. H. C. Rogers of Peterborough, Ontario

The somewhat tardy justice which has been done to the memory of the Loyalists of the American Revolution, although not, perhaps, directly attributable to the spirit of imperialism now afoot, has, in point of time, coincided not inappropriately with that movement.

In his monumental work on the history of England in the eighteenth century, Mr. Lecky's estimate of the character and position of the so-called Tories in the revolted colonies, has found a sufficiently ungrudging echo in the pages of not a few recent historical writers on this continent. In truth, Mr. Lecky's contention, "that the Loyalists to a great extent sprang from and represented the old gentry of the country," could, in the light of modern research, hardly be denied. American scholars of the type of Professor Hosmer of Washington, and Professor Tyler of Cornell, have amply, indeed generously, recognized this fact. It is to be regretted that the results of a century of misrepresentation concerning the Loyalists are still reflected in the tone of the more popular works on history disseminated in the United States. It was, perhaps, to be expected that the representatives of a beaten cause could hardly look for panegyric at the hands of the owners of the confiscated property and their immediate descendants. The great migration which ensued upon the rebellion, has been more than once compared, both in the magnitude of its scale and the pathos of its circumstances, with the Huguenot exodus from France a century earlier.

The efforts of this and of other kindred societies in the Dominion, should do much towards supplying material for future students of the inner history of the Loyalist migration. A few facts drawn, in so far as they are new, from documentary sources in the British Museum,* and from the War Office Correspondence† now preserved at the Record Office in London, may possibly prove not uninteresting, as a humble contribution towards the better understanding of the circumstances which attended the early settlement of part of this Province.

The founder of my own family in Upper Canada was my great-great-grandfather, Col. James Rogers. During the revolu-

* Brit. Mus. : Add. MSS.—21,820. Haldimand Papers : Correspondence with Col. Rogers and Major Rogers.

† War Office, Original Correspondence, No. 5 : Rogers' King's Rangers—Field Officers' Papers—1779-1784.

tionary war he had served for five years as commandant of a corps known as the King's Rangers, which, during that time, formed part of the garrison of St. Johns, Quebec. This post commanded the northern outlet of the great waterway which connects the valley of the Hudson with that of the St. Lawrence. At the Peace, my ancestor settled with some two hundred of his disbanded soldiers upon the shores of the Bay of Quinte, he and his followers occupying what is known as the township of Fredericksburg, (as well as part of an adjoining township.)*

The earliest recorded connection of this officer with Canada, however, dates from a quarter of a century earlier than the settlement. Of that part of the so-called Seven Years' War which was waged upon this continent, he saw service from the commencement to the close.†

As a captain in command of a detachment of his more famous brother, Robert Rogers' regiment—serving, however, independently of the main body—he took part in the campaigns in Cape Breton and Canada, under Wolfe and Amherst. He was present at the successive captures of Louisbourg, Quebec, and Montreal; the steps by which Canada passed from French to English rule.

Before Montreal, the army of the St. Lawrence, in which he was acting, was joined by the forces from the south, in whose campaigns the main body of Rogers' Rangers, eight hundred strong, under the command of his brother Robert, had played a somewhat conspicuous part.

Upon the capitulation of Montreal and the cession of Canada, this latter officer was despatched by the commander-in-chief upon the first British expedition, as such, up the great lakes. With two hundred of his rangers and a staff of executive officers, Robert Rogers made the voyage, in whaleboats, from Montreal to Detroit. The successive French posts upon the route were visited; the white standard of the Bourbons was replaced by the flag of Great Britain, and allegiance to His Britannic Majesty exacted.

The story of this voyage has often been told, notably in the Major's own military journals published in London in 1765, a work, which, with its companion volume, an account of North America, betraying an intimate knowledge of the continent from Labrador to the mouth of the Mississippi, has ever since been regarded as a valuable authority upon the geographical history of this country.

With the early and more brilliant part of the career of Robert Rogers, whose exploits as a partisan or light-infantry officer fill a large space in the history of the French and Pontiac Wars, we are not here immediately concerned. He has been the object of enthusiastic praise and of no less virulent detraction.

*Canniff page 62.

† Haldimand MSS., J. R. to Haldimand, Oct. 20th, 1779.

It is, however, a source of what, I trust, you will not regard as altogether unpardonable pride to my family and myself, that one of our name should have been thus intimately concerned in a transaction which was virtually the inception, as part of the British Dominions, of what is now the Province of Ontario,—a province which, from its earliest settlement, has been our home.

The interval between the close of the Seven Years' War, or, rather, of the Pontiac War, in which he also bore a part, and the revolt of the Colonies, was occupied by my great-great-grandfather, James Rogers, in the building up of an estate in that part of the Province of New York which was subsequently erected into the State of Vermont. Partly by grant as a reward for his services, and partly by purchase, he acquired what was, in extent, a very considerable property, scattered from twenty miles west of the Connecticut River to the shores of Lake Champlain. The crown patent for some 22,000 acres of this estate in Windham County is still in the possession of the family. We know from a letter in the Haldimand Correspondence, dated 1780, that the value he placed upon his property in the colonies was between thirty and forty thousand pounds.* Frequent references in the same correspondence show that the position he had occupied in Vermont, previously to the revolution, was one of influence and authority. The respect in which he was held in the country that had formerly been his home, is testified to by the fact that even after the Peace, viz.: in the spring of 1784, he had been invited by the leading men of the State to pay a visit to Vermont in order to facilitate the removal of his wife and family to their new home in the British Dominions.

Notwithstanding the efforts of his friends, the reception which he met with was not unmingled with insult at the hands of the owners of the confiscated property, who now grasped the helm; and the good man's surprise and horror at the state of anarchy prevailing are depicted in his letter to the commander-in-chief on his return to his regiment at St. Johns.

Between the close of the French and Indian Wars, and until after the outbreak of the American revolution, the other brother, Robert Rogers, spent most of his time in England. Here his various books were published† and here he enjoyed a very considerable notoriety. In old magazines of the period, amidst chronicles

* The picture which Sir George Trevelyan has drawn, in his recent volume on the American revolution, of the Utopian condition of colonial society in the days immediately preceding the rebellion, although perhaps too highly coloured, is not without considerable foundation in fact. The strong pro-American tone of the volume is perhaps only what was to be expected from the nephew of Macaulay and from the depositary *par excellence* of the Whig tradition.

† Journals of Major Robert Rogers—London, 1765, 8vo.

A Concise Account of North America by Major Robert Rogers. London, 1765, 8vo. Dublin, 1770, 12mo.

Ponteach—A Tragedy—London, 1776.

of the time, his exploits and his books find frequent mention.* The story of his prowess in the single-handed capture of a highwayman went the round of the taverns. His portrait in full Ranger uniform, with Indians in the background, adorned the windows of the print-shops, and was even reproduced in Germany. His tall figure, in half-pay officer's uniform, became a not unfamiliar object in the Court quarter of the town. He undoubtedly enjoyed the patronage and favour of the King. One of his enemies writing in 1770 to Sir William Johnson, complains that "Robert Rogers has the ear of the court; that many of the great are pushing for him; and that Mr. Fitzherbert, an officer high in the household of George III., is his particular friend."† Indeed, to the end he seems to have enjoyed the not entirely unequivocal distinction of King George's approbation. Lord George Germaine, writing to Gen. Howe as late as 1776, says, "The King approves the arrangement you propose, in respect to an adjutant-general and a quartermaster-general, and also your attention to Major Rogers, of whose firmness and fidelity we have received further testimony from Governor Tryon."‡

George III.'s choice of instruments at this period, notably in the case of Lord George,§ himself, as Secretary for the Colonies, is not generally regarded as betraying exceptional political sagacity.

Notwithstanding the royal favour, which does not seem to have been alienated even by his alleged eccentricity in appearing for a wager, on one occasion, at the King's levee, in the buckskin gaiters worn by rangers during their woodland campaigns, Robert Rogers was probably more at home in the society of soldiers of fortune, where his prowess as a boon companion and *raconteur* was doubtless popular.

In 1772 we find him writing from his lodgings at Spring Gardens, Charing Cross.¶ Soon after that, his superfluous energies found vent in foreign warfare. A true Captain Dalgetty, he fought in Northern Africa in the Algerine service. We know from a letter of Washington's that he was assigned to service in the East Indies,¶ when the outbreak of hostilities in America recalled him to the scene of his earlier activities. That he arrived in America with an open mind is not impossible. Unlike

* Gentleman's Magazine :—1758, Mar, Aug., Oct.; 1760, Nov, Dec; 1765, Dec.

London Monthly Review, xxxiv.9-22-242

† Johnson MSS. xviii. 185-186.

‡ American Archives, Fourth Ser., iv. 575.

§ Lord George Germaine, better known by his former name, Lord George Sackville, was the officer who, in command of the English cavalry at Minden, in a fit of spleen refused to charge and so marred the completeness of Prince Ferdinand's victory.

¶ Johnson MSS, xxi. 238.

¶ Spark's 'Washington,' iii 440.

his less brilliant but more substantial brother James, he was probably not the man to suffer gladly for a principle.

The conduct of the rebels, however, forced him prematurely into the service which would, probably, in any event have ultimately claimed him. Arrested shortly after his landing at Philadelphia, by order of the Pennsylvania Committee of Public Safety, he was submitted to the disposal of Congress. This body ordered his release on parole. His position as a half-pay officer, however, and his long identification with the royal service attracted the suspicion of the more violent Whigs, who clamoured for his re-arrest, which was ultimately decided upon. The indignity of this second arrest was treated by him as a virtual release from his parole. Consigned by the Continental Congress as a prisoner to be dealt with by the New Hampshire Assembly, he was fortunate enough to effect his escape. Received within the English lines, he was offered by the commander-in-chief, Gen. Howe, the commission of colonel in the British service, which offer he accepted.

With remarkable celerity he succeeded in raising the regiment so honourably known in the history of the revolution as the Queen's Rangers. This corps, to which very frequent reference has been made in the transactions of this Society, played, under his successor in the command, Colonel, afterwards Lieut.-General, Simcoe, a conspicuous part in the war, and subsequently, in the settlement of Upper Canada. Broken in health and possibly enfeebled by a life of dissipation, a tendency to which seems to have been his real moral weakness, he retired from his command in the following winter and returned to England. The evil example of dissipation and high play set at the headquarters camp between Bedford and Amboy, in the winter of 1776-77, was not without its effect upon the morale of the army. Bancroft even attributes the failure to crush Washington at Valley Forge in the following winter, to the eager pursuit of pleasure which distinguished Howe's command.

Meanwhile the Revolution ran its course. The singular incapacity which marked the conduct of the English arms almost throughout, was responsible for reverse after reverse. Spasmodic efforts to reinforce the army in America were made, and as the result of one of these, Robert Rogers arrived at New York in 1779 with instructions from home that he was to be again employed.

On May 1st 1779, he was commissioned by Sir Henry Clinton, Howe's successor in the command-in-chief, to raise a regiment of two battalions to be known as the King's Rangers. One battalion seems to have been destined for service in the Province of Quebec; the other for Halifax. In this regiment his brother James was gazetted major. A document in the War Office Correspondence shows that James Rogers's appoint-

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ment dated June 2nd 1779, although there was a still earlier commission to the same rank dated May 1st 1778. Recruiting parties were sent out into the northern colonies, and a ship was chartered by government for the conveyance to Quebec of Major James Rogers and eleven officers* gazetted to the new corps. This vessel, the brigantine "Hawke,"—Capt. Slaitor,—arrived at Quebec in September 1779. The colonel, Robert Rogers, with a staff of officers, was conveyed in H.M.S. "Blond" to Penobscot. There he was present at the naval engagement in which the rebel fleet was destroyed, August 13th 1779.

Meanwhile, with the accustomed mismanagement at headquarters, no definite instructions were sent to General Haldimand, Commander-in-chief in Canada, as to the embodiment of the new corps. So early as May 24th 1779, Lord Rawdon,—afterwards Lord Hastings, Governor-General of India,—then acting as Adjutant-General to Clinton, wrote to Haldimand, indicating the probable appearance of Col. Robert Rogers within the latter's command. With official dread of exceeding his instructions, and fearful of provoking animosities regarding recruiting in the other corps in the province, Haldimand hesitated how to act.

Meanwhile, the numerous recruits coming in by the overland route, consigned to the King's Rangers, had to be subsisted as best they might out of the unfortunate major's own pocket. Ultimately, however, and upon his own authority, Haldimand placed the corps upon his own establishment. A scale of half-pay was arranged, and the Rangers were clothed in the regulation green uniforms of the provincial corps. From this time forward the King's Rangers garrisoned the post of St. Johns, sharing the barracks there at first with the 34th and, subsequently, with the 29th regiments of foot. †

The correspondence of James Rogers with the commander-in-chief in Canada, from 1779 to 1784, is still preserved in the British Museum, and, together with fugitive letters of Robert Rogers, fills a substantial folio volume of manuscript. The "Field Officers Letters of Rogers' King's Rangers" are in the Record Office, London, removed there from the War Office Archives. The light

*Most of these were from one or other of the five battalions of Gen. Skinner's brigade. Two are described as from the Queen's Rangers.

†The army in Canada in 1781 consisted of the following troops: The 8th, 29th, 31st, 34th, 44th, 53rd, 150 men of the 47th, a battalion of the 84th or Maclean's Highland Emigrants, Sir John Johnson's Royal Regiment, of New York, Jessup's Loyal Rangers, formerly the Loyal Americans, and Rogers' King's Rangers. In addition to the above were the German troops, consisting chiefly of Brunswickers and Hessians. General Riedesel, in a plan communicated to Clinton, about this time, for operations against the Ohio and Alleghany regions, estimates the total effective strength in Canada at 6000 men.—*Max Von Eckling's Memoir of Major General Riedesel.*

which these old documents throw upon the military history of the time is a curious one. The chief difficulties in the administration of the corps seem to have arisen concerning the matter of recruiting and the intermingling of the accounts with those of Halifax, where the other detachment of the regiment was stationed. For the rest, James Rogers's relations with his commander-in-chief are excellent. Repeated testimony to the confidence felt in his integrity at headquarters occurs in the correspondence. His long apprenticeship to warfare, his intimate knowledge of the country, and undoubted zeal for the King's service contributed to his usefulness at this frontier post. Various schemes of reconnaissance and attack were, from time to time, submitted by him for his Excellency's consideration, and approved. His advice is asked and taken. On more than one occasion he seems to have been employed, where a field officer's services were demanded, upon missions of delicacy and importance. The growing despondency as to the issue of the war is apparent as time goes on. Incredulity as to the truth of the surrender at Yorktown is succeeded by consternation when the news of the disaster is confirmed. At last, in November 1783, the King's order for the disbanding of the loyalist troops arrives. It is accompanied by extracts from Lord North's letters respecting the allotment of lands to the provincial troops and refugee loyalists then in the Province of Quebec.

Throughout the winter of 1783-84, preparations are made for the move westward in the following year. In the early spring, my great-great-grandfather paid that last visit to his former home, allusion to which has been made above. His wife, a daughter of the Rev. David McGregor of Londonderry, N.H.,* accompanied him on his return, to renew in the northern forests that life of exile which had been the lot of her family earlier in the century. Upon his return to St. Johns, leave is asked on behalf of a number of incorporated and unincorporated loyalists, that an officer of the King's Rangers and a detachment of ten or a dozen men may go to Cataraqui to reconnoitre. A pathetic touch, betraying the ignorance and bewilderment of those distracted times, occurs, where the commanding officer notifies the commander-in-chief of a report which he had come upon "amongst our common men, that the major was going to have them taken to Cataraqui and there made slaves." Notwithstanding this alarming suggestion, confidence seems to have been restored; and most of the King's Rangers accompanied their old commander in that heroic advance into the wilderness, in search of a new home. Several of the officers remained at St. Johns, buying the ground on which their late barracks stood.

The tale of how the final allotment of the territory in the

*See History of Londonderry.

Frontenac district was made, is set out in Grass's narrative,* preserved by Dr. Ryerson. Grass, the pioneer of the district, chose the first township for his followers, Kingston; Sir John Johnson, the second, Ernesttown; Col. Rogers, the third, Fredericksburg; Major Vanalstine, the fourth, Adolphustown; and Col. McDonell and his company, the fifth, Marysburgh; "and so after this manner the first settlement of loyalists in Canada was made."

In the pages of Canniff's work upon the "Settlement of Upper Canada"† is preserved a story told by the late Dr. Armstrong, whose recollections dated back to the closing years of the eighteenth century. He remembered to have seen as a child, at my great-great-grandfather's house at Fredericksburg, a quantity of old implements of war: broken firelocks, torn uniforms, and cannon-balls. Not a few relics of the soldier settlement still exist in the family, in the shape of rusty small-arms, obsolete powder-horns and flint lock pistols.

James Rogers passed away in the year 1792. His brother Robert had died in England eight years previously, and shortly after the close of the war.‡

My great-great-grandfather was succeeded in his position in the settlement by his son, David McGregor Rogers, my great-grandfather, who, for twenty-four years, represented his district in the early Houses of Assembly of Upper Canada.§

A recently recovered copy of the journal of the House of Assembly for 1801, which had been lost at the sacking of York, now Toronto, in 1813, records how after the House had met and the members subscribed the oath, a message was delivered by the Gentleman Usher of the Black Rod. A brief and formal speech by His Excellency followed. Then:

"David M. Rogers, Esquire, Knight representing the Counties of Hastings and Northumberland, stood up, and addressing himself to the clerk (who, standing up, pointed to him and then sat down) proposed to the House, for their speaker, the Honourable D. W. Smith, Esquire, in which motion he was seconded by the Hon. Henry Allcock, Esquire, one of the judges of the Court of King's Bench, Knight representing the counties of Durham, Simcoe and the East Riding of York." The motion was carried, the new

*Ryerson's "Loyalists of British America," Vol. II., p. 211.

†Page 118.

‡I have followed here the family tradition as to the date of Robert Rogers's death. This places it in 1784. The writer of the article upon the life of Robert Rogers in the "Dictionary of National Biography"—London, 1897—places it in 1800, but in this he has followed Hough who, in his turn, evidently followed Sabine in the matter. There is no trace of his having lived after 1784, and everything, including the story in his family, points to his having died soon after his return from Halifax.

§See Morgan's "Celebrated Canadians."

Speaker expressing "his gratitude for the honour," and "thereupon he sat down in the chair." The House then adjourned.

David McGregor Rogers seems to have been a man of considerable force of character, uniting as he did the blood of his soldier-father with that of the Highland outlaws, which he owed to his mother, whose name he bore as part of his own. On one occasion he is said to have slain a wolf, the marauding tyrant of the district, with his oaken walking-stick. As a lad he had taken part in the migration, and upon his return to St. Johns years afterwards, he was invested with the dignity of an honorary chieftainship by the local Indians. He died at Grafton, Ontario, in 1824, while still a member of the House of Assembly.

In the foregoing attempt to tender a small act of piety to the memory of my great-great-grandfather and of justice to that of his gifted, but erratic brother, I trust that I have not too far trespassed upon your forbearance.

In the recrudescence of the spirit of imperial expansion with which we are familiar to-day, it is a not unsatisfactory reflection for us, the offspring of the loyalists, that it was for an ideal which at present animates so large a section of the Anglo-Saxon race, that our ancestors were ready, more than a century ago, to sacrifice all that seemed to make life valuable.

What that ideal was has perhaps never been better formulated than in the words of the historian Lecky: "It was the maintenance of one free industrial and pacific empire comprising the whole English race, holding the richest plains of Asia in subjection, blending all that was most venerable in an ancient civilization with the redundant energies of a youthful society, and likely in a few generations to outstrip every competitor and acquire an indisputable ascendancy in the globe."

"Such an ideal," he adds, in words which have been before now quoted before this society, "may have been a dream, but it was at least a noble one, and there were Americans who were prepared to make any personal sacrifice rather than assist in destroying it."